



Magic Flash

Newsletter of the Society of American Magicians Assembly 72

Notes from the February Workshop

The Performance Character

NOTES BY RICK HILL

Assembly President Rick Hill coordinated a workshop on the topic of The Performance Character. The workshop began with Rick presenting a mini-lecture on the subject followed by a discussion amongst the attendees. Here is a summary of Rick's presentation:

Just as actors play roles, so do magicians. In presenting a mental effect, you may play the part of a mentalist or a graphologist or an astrologer to do the same effect. As a mentalist you might be reading minds. As a graphologist, you would be claiming to analyze handwriting. And as an astrologer, you might read tarot cards. Sometimes we play the role of a demonstrator, a lecturer, an escape artist, an absent-minded professor, or even play yourself. Although you might have different roles in a given performance, you normally will want to present these roles using a single character. As an example of two performers who play the same role with different characters, consider **Max Maven** and **The Amazing Kreskin**. Both play the role of a mentalist. One evokes a character shrouded in mystery and arcane knowledge. The other seems to be a reasonably normal, perhaps somewhat shy person.

Characters can be close to the real you or be entirely fabricated. **Dai Vernon's** character was based on a normal person. When Vernon instructed us to be natural in our performance, he meant to act as a normal person would. Slydini's performance character was based on his own personality; his gestures and facial expressions and his culturally mixed speaking accent. You would be hard pressed to say that his actions were those a normal person would use in handling objects. Yet both Vernon and Slydini were very

successful using their performance characters to great effect. **Sylvester the Jester** is an example of a fabricated character. So is **Larry Impson** as Captain Jack. Their characters are much more theatrical; one being a living cartoon, the other a pirate. All of these characters can succeed if they are consistent.

To give better performances, it is critical that your performance character is consistent. Changing character during a single performance will weaken your performance or make your magic less believable. For example, changing from a light hearted, comedic character to a dark and mysterious character in order to present a mental effect in the middle of your act just isn't going to prove effective. Your audience will not be able to fully accept the dark, mysterious character after you previous light-hearted presentations. So, the effect you are after will suffer. Effects you perform need to be adapted to your character, express your character or be eliminated. You could develop different characters for different performances. So create an entire act based on your light-hearted character and another based on bizarre and mental effects using a dark, mysterious character.

Character development is an on-going task. A character focuses on certain aspects of our personalities and physical traits. It will amplify some (hopefully the good qualities) and minimize others (hopefully the not so good qualities). Impersonating another performer's character doesn't often work well. Taking a Slydini routine and trying to present it just as Slydini did will not be as successful as taking the routine and adapting it to your own performance character. Here are some ideas to help develop and refine your own character(s):

Analyze your strengths and weaknesses honestly Ask friends to suggest what movie roles they see you in. What effects that you perform seem to get the best audience response? What off-hand comments do audience make about you? Videotape a performance or two and look at them honestly.

As you develop your character, you also need to make

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sure that you are presenting the character in your performance. When Larry Impson performs as Captain Jack, it is incumbent upon him to go further than just saying he is a pirate. He must present himself as a pirate. Here are some tips of character presentation:

Dress the part

Speak the part

Scripting vs extemporaneous. It is important to have scripted each effect and, really, each act. Presenting from a script does have its problems. If you become overly dependent on the script, your act can seem unnatural. Best to script out your act and then practice without the script. Refer back to the script periodically to make sure you aren't leaving any important element out. By following the script in a loose way, you began to perform in an extemporaneous way.

Scripted but more natural. Of course, if following a script closely makes best sense, then by all means do so. Identify key points in effects and what to say (if anything) at that point. Even if you are making an extemporaneous presentation, there are key places in each effect that something needs to be said or a pause needs to be inserted. Make sure to identify those. In fact, where you know there will be a large block of silence, (say while someone is counting something), try and create a silent script for yourself. These are lines that your character would say while the action is occurring, but only say them to yourself in your mind's ear. This actor's technique will allow you to be involved and perhaps even have reactions during these silent periods that enhance the performance. Otherwise, these silent periods aren't contributing much to the entertainment value of the performance. Use terminology that fits your character. Don't use words or accents that are not in keeping with your character. Stay in character.

Select or adapt effects that are consistent with your character.

Use props appropriate to your character.

Adopt performance styles appropriate to your character. As an example, if you are going to spread cards to have one selected, which method would you use that fits best with your character: One handed fan (this implies skill at cards) Ribbon spread on the table (this does too) Sloppy spread of the cards from hand to hand (this implies you aren't that great with cards?)

Finally, remember that creating and using a performance character is an on-going process, not a one-time exercise.

Resources:

- Strong Magic*, Darwin Ortiz, Chapters 7-10
- Magic and Showmanship*, Henning Nelms, Chapter 4 and Chapter 12
- The Dai Vernon Book of Magic*, Lewis Ganson, Chapter 2
- Cyclopedia of Magic*, edited by Henry Hay, Entry on Presentation

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If you have not paid your local dues for 2005 yet, PLEASE pay them as soon as possible.

You can pay at the meeting or mail a check for \$20.00 to our treasurer:

Allen Greenberg
5500 Oak Hill Court
Carmichael, CA 95608-6644

Each member must pay \$12.00 for membership to Mission Oaks in order to use their meeting facilities. Please show your receipt to Allen Greenberg.

Monthly Meetings

Assembly 72 of the Society of American Magicians meets on the 4th Wednesday of every month at 7:00P.M. at Mission Oaks Recreation and Park District Senior Citizen's Community Center, 4701 Gibbons Dr., in Carmichael. *Prospective members are encouraged to visit us anytime!*

Meet My Assistant – *Miss Direction*

By David Wright

As we all know, misdirection is about controlling the attention of the audience. We direct their attention away from that which we don't want them to see and toward that which we do. We do this to hide a "secret move" within a magic act. We also do this to make sure that the audience is focused on important points of the effect, that they don't misunderstand or miss out on the climax. If the audience is looking away or not following along, the full impact of the effect, the moment that magic happens, will not be achieved.

Although misdirection is a vital element of our magic, many magicians today do not make full use of it as a conjuring tool. The fact that the audience does not actually see the secret move during a particular effect does not mean that they don't perceive it. We magicians need to be careful to not give the audience a reason to be suspicious of our actions. Even an innocent move or gesture may be misconstrued as a secret move. There-fore, our actions must be logical and controlled. We need to be sure that every movement appears natural and reasonable. We do not want to make any movement that inadvertently alerts or arouses distrust in our audience. A proper study and application of the principles of misdirection can help to this end.

Misdirection is both a theoretical concept and an applied action. Misdirection, when coupled with body language, is a very powerful tool indeed. This type of misdirection is called choreographed misdirection because it employs body movement to subtly lead and focus audience attention. With body movement, we can direct our spectators' attention toward that which we want them to see, a particular point of interest, and away from that which we don't want them to see. We can do this with an overt action, like the pointing of a finger, or by a subvert action, like the mere nod of the head toward something. In addition, we can obscure smaller (hidden) action with large motions because the eye will tend to follow larger motion instinctively. In this way we can obfuscate a secret move and lead the audience to points of interest within an effect at the same time. **Gary Kurtz** has



written extensively on this type of misdirection in his 1992 book *Leading With Your Head*.

At our next meeting on March 23, there will be a mini-workshop on misdirection. We will discuss the psychology behind the subject as well as various techniques for applying misdirection. If you have any ideas on this weighty subject, please come prepared to discuss them with us. This may be one of the most important workshops we do all year. Make your next assistant, Miss Direction.

February Meeting Notes

The theme for the February meeting was *Packet Tricks*, and coincidentally, all of the magic performances that evening featured Packet Tricks.

The first magician on stage was **Vice-President David Wright**. David performed an entertaining Three-Card Monte trick which was performed while David recited a funny poem about the cards and Three-Card Monte. David took First Place.

Next up was **Charlie Fass** who performed what he called *The Royal Flash*. With just a small number of cards, Charlie kept coming up with different Poker hands with completely different values each time. He finally ended up with a Royal Flush which seemed impossible, but there it was for all to see!

Last but not least was **Rick Hill**, who performed *Paul Harris' Reset*. Four Aces are shown and placed face down on the table. Then four Jacks are displayed and kept in his hands. One by one the Jacks turn into the Aces! Upon pressing the reset button on the back of the packet of Jacks, all of the cards instantly were restored to their original locations; Jacks in Rick's hands and Aces on the table.

SAM Assembly 72 • 2005 Magic Calendar

Meetings begin promptly at 7:00 p.m.

- March 23** **MONEY MAGIC and a SAM Workshop – David Wright will be presenting a workshop on Misdirection.**
- March 30** **SAM'S Michael Ammar Lecture – 7:00 p.m. in Elk Grove**
- April 14 Aldo Colombini at Grand Illusions
- April 23 IBM's Docc Hilford Workshop and Lecture – RSVP with Larry Impson
- April 27** **Theme - Sucker Tricks - Workshop by Bill Brooks and Dale Lorzo on the history of some of their magic props.**
- May 5 Oz Pearlman at Grand Illusions
- May 17** **SAM'S Troy Hooser Lecture – Live in Elk Grove!**
- May 25** **Meeting Theme — Mental Effects – Workshop by Joe Chez on performing for special-needs audiences.**

Find our Assembly activities in the Sacramento Bee's web site at <http://ourtown.sacbee.com/SocietyofAmericanMagiciansAssembly72>

The Magic Flash

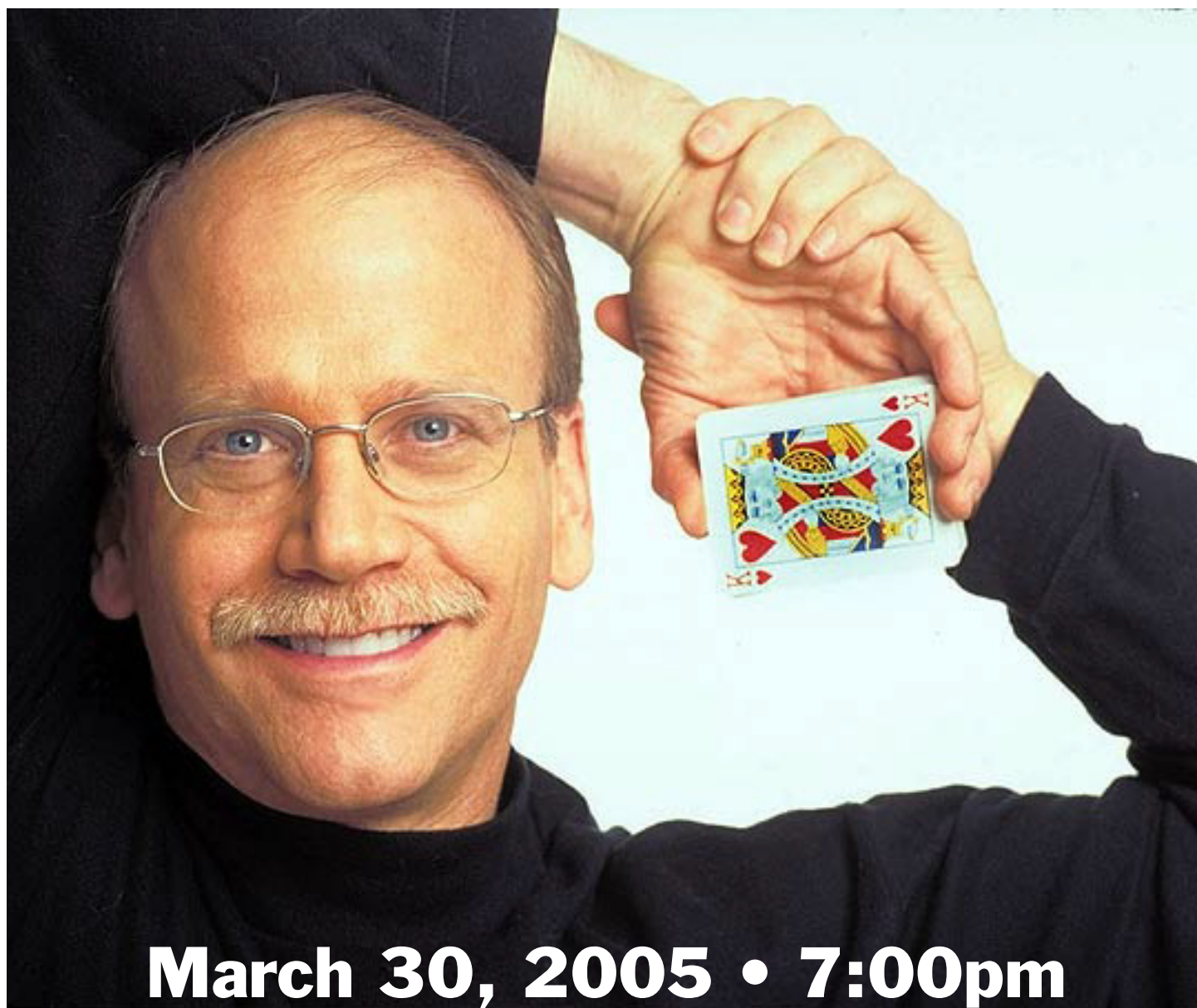
**Society of American Magicians
Sacramento Assembly 72
Viktor Berry, Secretary
2827 Tiber Drive, #37
Sacramento, CA 95826-2533**



Next meeting:

March 23rd • 7:00 p.m.

**Money Magic and a workshop on
Misdirection!**



March 30, 2005 • 7:00pm

Michael Ammar "Live in Elk Grove"

Presented by the Society of American Magicians Assembly 72
and the Elk Grove Magic Circle

9275 East Stockton Blvd, Rm. 100, Elk Grove

To get to the lecture from Sacramento, take Hwy 99 south; take Bond-Laguna off-ramp; go East across Hwy 99 to the first traffic light; turn right onto East Stockton Blvd.. Building is one-story across from Frontier office. Parking is next to the building and at the next group of offices; vacant at night.

Admission:

\$ 5.00 - Members of SAM 72 and E.G.M.C.

\$10.00 - Their immediate family members

\$20.00 - All others

Exact change is greatly appreciated!



For more information, please call
David Wright (916) 944-8454 or
Viktor Berry (916) 362-8355
Rick Hill (707) 678-8807

SAM Assembly 72 Library Update

The issue of what to do with the SAM/IBM video library has come to closure for IBM. IBM will not be lending commercial videos or DVDs from their library. They will just keep archived copies of club events in theirs. We will get all of the SAM-specific tapes back from the joint library. Anyone who donated commercial items to the library will get a chance to get them back. Whatever is left would be split between SAM and IBM (under a yet-to-be-determined mechanism). IBM intends to either auction the ones they keep or give them as prizes.

So, now SAM 72 needs to address the library issue. Should we have a lending library that includes both videos of our events and performances as well as commercial videos? This will be a discussion item at the March meeting. We will devote at most 15-20 minutes to discussion of how to proceed. So, if you have input, be prepared. Even better, if you have the time and inclination, call or e-mail Rick Hill with your comments.

Here's some information that may help on the issue of commercial videos:

1. We now have a legal opinion from SAM National that gives us the latitude to continue lending commercial items if we choose. Borrowers must agree to a "I will not copy" statement to check out commercial items.

2. The joint IBM/SAM library has been seldom used over the past year or so by members of either group.

3. We will still need a librarian (even if we only archive our own videos.) The library contents will be posted on the club web site in a *Members Only* area. Those without internet access can get a hardcopy of the library at regular meetings or by mail.

4. To check items out, the librarian would be contacted by e-mail, mail or phone to arrange to borrow the items) in question. The library will not be brought to meetings. The board feels that this streamlined lending process will make the librarian's job much easier while still providing access to the library.

5. The SAM library, whatever its contents, would be an exclusive benefit to SAM 72 members.

6. If we were to include commercial items, should the source of those items continue to be member donations to the library or should the club also spend some funds to enhance the library? If you feel the club should spend funds, how much maximum per year would be reasonable?

While trying to stay neutral on the issue of commercial items, I would like to add that if we do pursue lending commercial products, we could change the flavor of those resources to include e-books, books and/or magazines (a club subscription to *Genii* or *Magic*, for example).

In doing research on the legality of lending commercial items, we have heard some vendor opinions on the lending issue. As you might expect, the publishers and producers of material want you to buy your own copy and feel lending is unethical. On the other hand, there is no legal reason we cannot do it.

The owner of <http://www.lybrary.com> who publishes magic e-books, has suggested that libraries often pay a slightly higher price for books. (By the by, he is willing to do a pilot program with us to make their products available to our library at a "library price.").

So, there you have it. Please mull over what library services you would like SAM 72 to offer (or not offer) members and either send me your feedback or come by our next meeting and give us some input.

February Meeting Notes

Edward Auel, a prospective new member visited us. Please make him feel at home when you see him next month.

New members joining in 2005 will not have to pay local dues for this year. Members bringing in the most new members this year will get their National Dues paid by the Assembly. Invite some of your magic friends who have not joined to visit us this year.

We have a new web site on the Internet thanks to Web Guru Rick Hill. You can visit the site at

<http://magic1.org/sam72> for the latest up-to-date news for our Assembly and much more.